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SYNOPSIS ON

THE STUDY OF THE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS OF *THE SCARLET LETTER, DAISY MILLER* AND *GONE WITH THE WIND* WITH REGARD TO THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR PERIODS

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Research Outline

Introduction

Position of Women in Society

The myth of the natural inferiority of women greatly influenced the status of women in law. During the early history of the United States, a man virtually owned his wife and children as he did his material possessions. If a poor man chose to send his children to the poorhouse, the mother was legally defenseless to object. Some communities, however, modified the common law to allow women to act as lawyers in the courts, to sue for property, and to own property in their own names if their husbands agreed. Under the common law of England, an unmarried woman could own property, make a contract, or sue and be sued. But a married woman, defined as being one with her husband, gave up her name, and virtually all her property came under her husband's control.

We can say that, most American women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century lived in an age characterized by gender inequality. Women were expected to remain subservient to their fathers and husbands. Their occupational choices were also extremely limited. Middle- and upper-class women generally remained home, caring for their children and running the household. Lower-class women often did work outside the home, but usually as poorly-paid domestic servants or labourers in factories and mills.

Literature from the times gives us a good insight into the lives of women, how they lived and what was expected of them.

The three women protagonists in the novels: one from Puritan New England; the writer from New England - *The Scarlet Letter*: one from an American family and the writer an expatriate American - *Daisy Miller* and one from Old South and writer from South - *Gone with the Wind,* by deliberately choosing to challenge the diktats of the society wanted to possibly make a point. What were the circumstances that propelled them to behave in a manner so inconsistent with the prevailing the prevailing norms?

Hypothesis

The portrayal of female protagonists in *The Scarlet Letter, Daisy Miller* and *Gone with the Wind* and their rebellious acts highlight the gender inequality existing in the society during that time.

The world of Hester Pyrnne in *The Scarlet letter*:

The Puritans, who settled in the area they named Massachusetts Bay Colony; present-day Boston; in the 1630s forms the setting of *The Scarlet Letter*. Nathaniel Hawthorne has tried to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of his Puritan ancestors through the novel. His knowledge of their customs and beliefs and his admiration for their strengths is balanced by his concerns for their rigid and oppressive rules.

The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony believed that all mankind was depraved and sinful because of Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden. Because Adam and Eve were willful and disobedient to God, they brought upon mankind the curse of depravity,

on account of the Original Sin. The society built by the Puritans was stern and repressive, with little room for individualism. In this society, the path of righteousness was very narrow and taught through stern sermons on guilt and sin.

In *The Scarlet Letter,* Nathaniel Hawthorne explores and exposes different facets of relationships, religion, community discipline, sin and punishment that existed in the Puritan community of 17th century Boston. It depicts the pain and suffering a woman went through when she broke her marriage vows, and disobeyed her religion. The novel's protagonist, Hester Prynne, has an adulterous affair with Arthur Dimmesdale after her husband has been absent many years and presumed dead. Hester is sentenced to a public punishment to be humiliated, tormented, and alienated by the community around her. The 17th century puritan society of Boston would not accept sin of any kind and the punishment for adultery was death. Instead, the community stigmatises Hester with the letter "A" for the rest of her life and makes her stand in front of the whole community as an example for everyone that sin and corruption was not accepted in their society. Though she is forced to carry the burden of her sin plainly on her breast, Hester manages to work and raise a child on her own, and maintain strict moral integrity throughout the novel. She never blames Dimmesdale for abandoning her and her daughter, and even keeps her husband's identity a secret at his request. Dimmesdale, however, proves to be an extraordinarily weak character, as his moment of sin leads him to self-destruction instead of self-fulfillment. While Hester builds a new life for herself out of her sin, Dimmesdale not only shirks his duties as a father, he literally devastates himself in his guilt.

The townspeople intrigue the reader because they gradually evolve throughout the book. In the beginning of the novel, they are generally harsh and judgmental towards Hester, because she has committed adultery. As the novel progresses, they slowly allow Hester and her daughter into their community, but still look at them with suspicion and doubt. Gradually, they begin to realise the abilities of Hester despite her past. Hester works selflessly and devotes herself to the wellbeing of others. "Hester sought not to acquire anything beyond a subsistence of the plainest and most ascetic description, for herself, and a simple abundance for her child." The townspeople begin to see the scarlet letter that she wears in a whole new light. Its meaning changes from "adultery" to "able." In the end of the novel, the townspeople finally come to accept the idea that Hester and Pearl perform as significant a role in and are as much a part of the society as them. They respect her because of her strength in times of anguish and despair. "Here had been her sin; here, her sorrow; and here was yet to be her penitence… the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness, and became a type of something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence, too."

The World of *Daisy Miller:*

Daisy Miller is a short novel, or novella, centering on conflicts arising from interaction between artless American tourists and sophisticated Europeans. Therefore, the novel explores the theme of contrast between American and European cultures and also the constraints that society places on individual freedom.

Henry James published *Daisy Miller* in 1878, a time when many Americans were making fortunes in the burgeoning industries of the U. S. Some of these newly rich Americans lacked the culture and sophistication to move in the high social circles to which they gained entry with their money. When they traveled to Europe, they often suffered ridicule from the long-established elite of the society, the aristocrats. Americans, who were natives in Europe, had adopted European ways and hence they also ridiculed their gauche countrymen. In *Daisy Miller*, the Millers are among the nouveau-riche. They have enough money to buy the best clothes, hire the best help, and stay at the best hotels, but lack the cultural finesse that the European aristocrats passed on from one generation to the next.

According to most critics *Daisy Miller* is a work primarily concerned with the nuances of character and the effects that social values and manners have on individual actions. James himself declared the novella to be about innocence, specifically Daisy's innocence in conflict with the sophistication of the modern world. She is a curious mixture of traits. She is spirited, independent, and well meaning, but she is also shallow, ignorant, and provincial. She has no social graces or conversational gifts, such as charm, wit, and a talent for repartee, and she is really interested only in manipulating men and making herself the centre of attention. Daisy refuses to conform to the customs and conventions of high society and spurns expectations that she behave as a demure stereotype in male-female relationships. For example, she gallivants about unescorted with Giovanelli. She ignores Mrs. Walker’s advice about public behaviour. And she tells Winterbourne that “I’ve never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me or to interfere with anything I do.”

Contrasted with this is the character of Winterbourne. An American who has lived most of his life in Europe, Winterbourne is the type of Europeanized expatriate that Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker also represent. In many ways, Winterbourne is as central a character as Daisy and may very well be the story's true protagonist. Certainly, he is the novel's central consciousness, the character through whose eyes we see and experience everything. Throughout the novel, Winterbourne obsesses over the question of whether Daisy is a "nice" girl, and Daisy's behavior never reveals whether she is or isn't. The whole novel is, in a sense, the story of Winterbourne's attempts and inability to define Daisy in clear moral terms. Winterbourne is preoccupied with analysing Daisy's character. He wants to be able to define and categorise her, pin her down to some known class of woman that he understands. Daisy is a novelty to him. Her candour and spontaneity charm him, but he is also mystified by her lack of concern for the social niceties and the rules of propriety that have been laid down by centuries of European civilization and adopted by the American community in Rome.

The scene in the Colosseum, where Winterbourne comes upon Daisy and Giovanelli, reveals Winterbourne at his most pathetic. He immediately takes the fact of Daisy's presence there, at that hour and in that situation, as evidence of her worthlessness. Still, Winterbourne's reaction is complex. He is horrified but also relieved, and he is "angry with himself" for having wasted so much time bothering about "the right way of regarding Miss Daisy Miller." At Daisy's funeral, Giovanelli tells Winterbourne that Daisy was beautiful and also innocent, which serves as a disturbing revelation for Winterbourne.

The conclusion of the novel is poignant. James not only suggests that Winterbourne went right back to his former life, but he states this in a way that suggests that the whole story has just been part of an ongoing process of inconsequential gossip, with no importance for anyone.

The World of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*

Maragaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is set against the backdrop of the Antebellum Southern Society. The Old South, as depicted in the novel, is a land of prosperous plantations and happy Negroes, large white houses with window glass, cultured people who could read and write, music and literature, and a stable economy based on cotton.

The world presented in *Gone with the Wind* is one defined by rigid gender and social codes of conduct. Clear rules govern the dress, actions, and speech of ladies and gentlemen. A Southern belle is an archetype for a young woman of the American Old South's upper class and stands for Southern hospitality, cultivation of beauty and a flirtatious yet chaste demeanour. A woman was trained to attract a rich man, provide children and run a home.

From the beginning of the text, Scarlett is both constrained by and in rebellion against the conventions of her society. As a child she can ride and climb as well as her male friends; and then as a young woman she is transformed into a "proper" young lady, under the guidance of her mother and her Mammy. However, it is quite apparent that Scarlett is ill at ease being the demure and genteel lady that she is expected to be. Scarlett's reaction to this endlessly self-generating cultural demand for calculated performance is not a positive one. It frustrates her, and over the course of the novel she

becomes less and less willing to maintain and enact the required facade. When her Mammy scolds her into remembering, in order to catch her man Scarlett must become completely "unnatural" — denying her actual hunger in the interests of seeming like a delicate young lady; Scarlett responds, "I'm tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything I want to do."

The notion that Scarlett represents a critique of both Southern womanhood *and* manhood is suggested throughout *Gone with the Wind*. Her gradual emergence from a demure Southern belle to a successful businesswoman, who is better at calculating and managing responsibilities than the men who surround her, acts as a significant indicator of her character progression and in a way ‘unsexes’ her. Though Scarlett is disapproved of by the Old Atlanta society for her "unwomanly" behavior in running her own businesses, the war has at least made it possible for a woman to break out of her traditional gender role - a thing that would have been unthinkable previously. Scarlett begins to talk and act like a man, takes charge at Tara, supports Ashley and his family, and employs Ashley at her mill, all activities that are traditionally the preserve of the male.

As we approach the end of this epic saga, the idealised young men of the South – the Ashleys – have all disappeared in battle, “gone with the wind” and their glory has been debased and deflated. The benevolent white patriarchs are equally destroyed, reduced — like Gerald O'Hara — to madness and despair. As the narrator says, the Old South was a "happy feminine conspiracy." Men were led to believe that they were in-charge, but actually it was the Southern white women who actually wielded power. At Tara in the days before the war, "only one voice was obeyed on the plantation"- Ellen O'Hara's.

Finally, Scarlett's 'masculinity' not only pulls down the structure of gender expectations and behaviour but also destroys the culture of which it was a product.

Rationale and significance of the study

Women, as we are all aware, have been by and large ignored or neglected in all spheres of life until recently. The study will be important from the point of view that it focuses only on women and understanding their psyche and position resulting from years of repression. It will primarily concentrate on the 18th and 19th century to correspond with the time period of the novels. Also, these centuries were significant from the point of view of the women as many critical developments took place during this time. It will also tell us how different the female protagonists in the three novels are from their counterparts in society. What were the expectations from them by their respective families and the society at large?

An overview of the previous research done in this area has not focused on the plight of women and their position in society. Also, it has not compared these three protagonists and neither has it commented on the status of women in the 18th and 19th century in relation to these works. Hence, this study will enable a better understanding of the position of women in society and also throw light on how these authors viewed women; what are the similarities and differences in the manner in which they viewed women and in what ways through these three female protagonists have they offered a critique on the position of women.

Scope of study

The scope of this study will involve a thorough understanding of the position of women in the 18th and 19th century America and Europe (where expat Americans lived). What were the expectations and restrictions imposed on women by the society during this time?

How were women depicted in American literature of that time? How are the protagonists in *The Scarlet Letter, Daisy Miller* and *Gone with the Wind* different from the other American female protagonists from the same period? The study will also focus on the how the portrayal of each of these female protagonists acts as a critique on the status of women in the 19th century.

How each author's portrayal of women was influenced by the women in their lives? What is the difference, if any, between how the two male authors (Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James) have depicted women and how the female author (Margaret Mitchell) has depicted them? A comparison between how popular fiction (*Gone with the Wind*) depicted women and how classical literature (*The Scarlet Letter* and *Daisy Miller*) portrayed them.

The study will also look at the time gap between the author and the character and study how it affects the treatment and vision. In case of Hawthorne it was over 150 years, in case of Henry James it did not exist and for Margaret Mitchell it was about 60 years.

The acts of transgression of all three protagonists were different. What is the respective authors' opinion about the transgressions that each of the female protagonists

commits? Do they view it as a transgression? What is the message each of them is trying to get across through their respective protagonists?

Tentative Chapterisation

Chapter 1 – Introduction : the chapter will look at the position of women in the society in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Chapter 2 – The Scarlet Letter: the chapter will focus on the Puritan Society and the status of women in that society. It will analyse Hester's actions and the society's reaction.

Chapter 3 – Daisy Miller: the chapter will concentrate on the expat American society during the 19th century. Comparison between the American Society and the expat American society. It will also examine the behaviour and actions of Daisy Miller in relation to the above.

Chapter 4 – Gone with the Wind: the chapter will look closely at the Southern Life and Society and Scarlet's rebellious acts. What were the repercussions?.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Possible Conclusion

The study hopes to establish a connection between the authors' portrayals of the three protagonists and their intention. The study should be able to conclude that the authors' intention was to highlight the unfavorable circumstances in which these women protagonists operated and thereby bring about a transformation in their condition.

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